BACK TRACK

Dorian Grooves

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WE BEGAN LOOKING AT modes from a harmonic perspective in the previous Back Track installment ("Digging Modal Harmony," Aug. '00 *GP*). In that lesson, we saw how Mixolydian scale tones can be combined to forge I, IV, Vm, and ♭VII triads, which we can then assemble into Mixolydian-flavored chord progressions. This time around, let's check out Dorian harmony.

Chord construction. It's easy to organize notes from the Dorian mode into specific triads. First, a quick review: Compared to a major scale, Dorian has a formula of 1, 2, ♭3, 4, 5, 6, and ♭7. **Ex. 1a** shows a one-octave *E* Dorian pattern (*E*, *F♯*, *G*, *A*, *B*, *C♯*, *D*). After you ascend and descend through this pattern to familiarize yourself with its sound, play the triads in **Ex. 1b**—*Em*, *A*, *Bm*, and *D*. Notice how each triad is composed exclusively from notes contained in *E* Dorian:

- *E*, *G*, *B* (*Em*)
- *A*, *C♯*, *E* (*A*)
- *B*, *D*, *F♯* (*Bm*)
- *D*, *F♯*, *A* (*D*)

These four triads are indigenous to *E* Dorian. While they also appear in various combinations in other scales and modes, only *E* Dorian presents them in this specific relationship—*Em* being the Im, *A* the IV, *Bm* the Vm, and *D* the ♭VII. (Other triads reside within *E* Dorian, but we'll focus on these four because they work so well to define the mode harmonically.)

Jamming with Dorian. A progression will be Dorian if it contains some permutation of Im, IV, Vm, and ♭VII. This means you can improvise over the chords using the Dorian mode played from the Im's root. To experience this interaction, first play **Ex. 2**, a four-bar progression created from our four *E* Dorian chords.

Record a backing track with this harmony, and then jam with it using the *E* Dorian pattern in **Ex. 3**. Played as written, this pattern won't sound like music—it's simply a map of possibilities—but you can use it to craft your own melodies. As you solo, be sure to vary your rhythms and incorporate intervallic jumps. While playing *E* Dorian over the progression, remember:

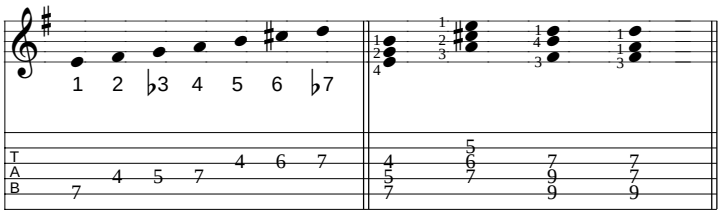
- Three notes from *E* Dorian will belong to the chord of the moment. When you play a chord tone, it will blend with the harmony.
- The remaining four *E* Dorian notes (those that *aren't* in the chord of the moment) can be used to generate compelling tension.
- Non-scale tones (those outside of *E* Dorian) will be dissonant. These are useful as passing notes.

Wail on. To fully digest this concept, pick another Dorian mode and work out its Im, IV, Vm, and ♭VII. Next create a progression using these chords, record it as a rhythm track, and then use the parent Dorian mode to improvise over the groove.

Next time, we'll explore Aeolian harmony.

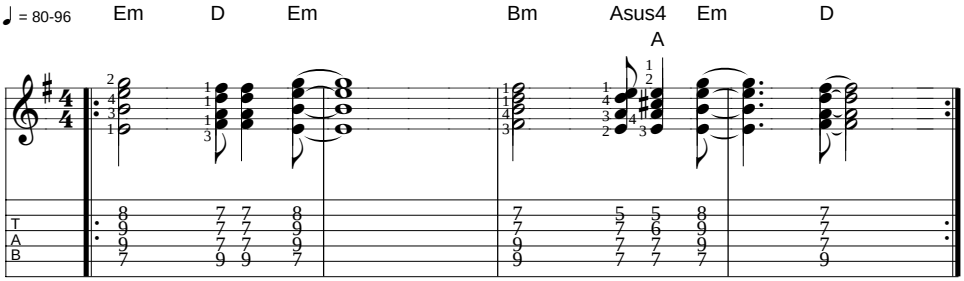
Got a topic you'd like to see us address? Send it to Back Track, c/o *Guitar Player*, 2800 Campus Dr., San Mateo, CA 94403, or e-mail it to guitplyr@mfi.com.

Ex. 1a



Ex. 1b

Ex. 2



Ex. 3